

DREYFUS, TAYLOR, AND POLANYI'S PRESCIENCE



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ABSTRACT

Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor argue explicit conceptual knowledge has an essential pre-conceptual “background” fully embedding the knower in the world. This refutes the Cartesian view that knowledge of the outside world is mediated through the mind of the observer. This “mediational” view is undermined by Kant, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and Todes, and the “contact theory” they make possible. I add Polanyi to the list, as tacit knowing accomplishes similar things in better fashion.

The appearance of *Retrieving Realism*, jointly written by prominent philosophers Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, has naturally occasioned much commentary, including in *Tradition and Discovery* (XLIII, 1, 2017).¹ The book continues a long-running discussion of realism that has included Richard Rorty, John McDowell, and others, offering both a summary of the debate thus far and some new arguments by Dreyfus and Taylor.² So this review drops into the middle of a protracted discussion, one that has touched on a wide range of issues and philosophers of the past forty years; needless to say, the present book and its review are a truncated version of this wider exchange. I concentrate on two important features, the authors’ explication of the “background” to knowing and their efforts to describe “the real.” I then discuss broader implications of these issues, particularly those of interest to readers of this journal.

In Chapter One of *Retrieving Realism*, Dreyfus & Taylor identify four strands of “the picture that held us captive,” the “mediational” epistemology that begins with Descartes. The first is the insistence that knowledge of the world can only come to us if mediated through representations (depictions, ideas, beliefs, sentences) in the mind. A second strand is the “normal implication of this meditational picture that the content of our knowledge can be analyzed into clearly defined, explicit elements” (11). The third strand claims that “we can never go beyond/below these explicit, formulated elements” in justifying our beliefs (11). The fourth is the distinction between body and mind, or “the dualist sorting” Dreyfus and Taylor later add to this list by noting other implications of these strands, such as skepticism, the ideals of freedom, autonomous reason, and self-government. Although they elsewhere use different terms for some of these elements (for example, “the atomism of the inputs” when referring to explicit representations), the four strands form a robust list of prominent features of the “objectification of the world,” and the “disenchantment” resulting from modern epistemology. The authors claim that two results of this traditional epistemology are skepticism and relativism (46, 55-56), which conflict with their conviction that philosophy can contribute to a “healing” of our troubled times, allowing us “to flourish in healthier ways than was possible in the critical tradition” (Taylor 1995, xii).

The reactions to this “disengaged stance” have been forceful and varied, all agreeing that the meditational view has made us “divided beings, needing to be healed” (*RR*, 10-11).

Beginning with Kant, a number of thinkers objected to the reduction of knowledge to a simple mental content, with no connection to any others, and began to insist that if there were no relations between our ideas, they would have no meaning for us, and we would lose the unity of the world which perception makes manifest.

[These arguments] can be seen as a turning point in modern philosophy. With hindsight, we can see them as the first attempt to articulate the background that the modern disengaged picture itself requires... and to use this articulation to undermine the picture. Once one goes through this transition, the whole philosophical landscape changes, because the issue of background understanding is out in the open (33).

According to Dreyfus and Taylor, it is Heidegger who helps us to see that not only the atomism of impressions must be rejected in favor of a more holistic view of perception, but also the assumption that we acquire knowledge through a neutral, “disengaged” stance. Such a stance is seen to be possible only against the background of an already engaged being-in-the-world. To grasp things in perception is to be involved with them, to display intention at the most basic level of awareness (11).

Without following out all the details of their exposition of the contact theory with which they would replace the meditational picture, I want to turn to the “already engaged being-in-the-world” that Dreyfus and Taylor refer to as the *background* of knowledge.

On Background

What does “background” actually mean? We understand the basic idea, but why does such a simple, seemingly trivial idea, designated by human speech perhaps for thousands of years, have epistemological significance now? By observing their uses of the term we can gain some insight into the meaning they assign it. Dreyfus and Taylor refer to “background” as a “framework,” a “setting,” and a “context.” In addition, they describe it in terms of our “gripping” or “grasping” reality, of “coping,” or “aligning ourselves.” It is both an “understanding” and a pre-conceptual, implicit, tacit “preunderstanding.” The background is “the whole form of life,” “an overall grasp,” and “holistic.”⁴ While this may seem at first a lamentable looseness on the authors’ part, careful attention to these terms yields a remarkably rich picture of the phenomenon of a background to knowledge, roughly corresponding to the “themes” of the background that Taylor and Dreyfus discuss in the book. Grouping this long list under five headings will allow us to see more clearly the content of their “contact theory.”

(1) The background to our knowing is *primordial*; it is precisely that part of our conceptualizing which cannot be made explicit, which it is impossible to “foreground.” It is the refusal of the human organism to “dilute the...intentional thickness of perception” by flattening and homogenizing our encounter with the world.⁴ The various dimensions of this incorrigible “thickness” of perception—logical, temporal, cognitive—are what Dreyfus and Taylor try to signal by calling the background a “primordial framework,” and the many other cognates and correlates they use.

(2) The background is *active*. There is a subtle move in the critical tradition from describing the process of knowing to describing what is known, and how it can be justified. One can only make this move by converting the process of knowing into a purely passive reception of sense impressions (for empiricists like Hume and Locke) or of ideas (for rationalists like Descartes), and it results in conceiving of knowledge as an isolated artifact—a fact, a theory, an idea or concept—which can then be subjected to exhaustive analysis and verification. So one feature of the background that Dreyfus and Taylor want to recover is its active nature. The background is not a blank curtain or screen hanging at the back of the mind; it is rather a grasping, a seeking for sense in what is in front of us (18, 21). The background of our understanding is a “steady flow” of intention through which we “align ourselves” with experience (47, 62). We do not passively receive beliefs about the world—not even through the categories of understanding that Kant believed were part of our mental architecture—but we “engage with” the world,

“grouping” and “generating” our beliefs in a “continuing transaction” with the world (36, 48, 64). This emphasis on the process of knowing—particularly of discovery—has often been dismissed by the philosophical guild as mere “psychologizing” and not actually doing philosophy; this was a criticism of Michael Polanyi’s work, for example.

Dreyfus and Taylor illustrate action by emphasizing coping, by which the knower deals with the world by making sense of the “conditions of experience” (51ff.). Both in physiological coping (walking up a path, driving a car) and conceptual coping (having a conversation, thinking discursively, doing mathematics) we exercise skills we have learned, usually unconsciously, in reading and making sense of experience. Most important, “theoretical knowledge has to be situated in relation to everyday coping to be the knowledge that it is” (54). “Background” and “foreground” simply mark different aspects of the same experience, of the same act of perception by which we make sense of things. Though Dreyfus and Taylor use examples primarily from Merleau-Ponty (the footballer, etc.) in illustrating this point, a similar point can be made through the acquisition of skills, as Polanyi shows.

(3) The background is *meaningful*. It is an original move in which we engage the world and this engagement is marked throughout by its significance for us. Human knowing is not just like a plant turning to the sun, though it includes basic physical abilities; it is rather a stretching out toward richer significance in reality, toward meaning that is relevant to us: “[W]e need to see this understanding as that of an engaged agent, determining the significances...of things from out of its aims, needs, purposes, desires” (69). The mediational perspective’s alliance with a claim of radical objectivity has distorted human knowing by insisting that it must be completely impersonal. What was important for Descartes—overcoming the uncertainty, disagreements, and stagnation of traditional knowledge claims while providing a firm basis for the new sciences—led inexorably to the impossible ideal of achieving *all* knowledge without a knower, of reaching a perspective on the world completely abstracted from the messiness of human life. Dreyfus and Taylor’s careers have been largely spent critiquing the aspirations of social science (including computing) to be more objective, more quantitative, more like the natural sciences, and that critique is supported here.⁵

(4) The background is *holistic*. Returning to Kant, Dreyfus and Taylor see another necessary constituent of “overcoming epistemology” as the awareness that knowledge must be integral, encompassing “the whole form of life,” “an already operative overall grasp of things,” because “every bit of my understanding draws on the whole” (38, 39, 46). Though it is the phenomenologists Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and the later Wittgenstein who have made this point most emphatically, it began with Kant’s rejection of the “atomism of inputs” that undergirded Hume and Locke’s empiricism. “The mediational approach seems to want to take each belief as though it was there on its own, standing alone, frameworkless” (20). Sense impressions enter the mind as discrete,

particular bits of information that are then assembled into the ideas that constitute our concepts and theories. The more amenable such impressions are to quantification, the more certain knowledge becomes.

Beginning in the early 20th century, philosophers became restless with this assumption of atomism, and a new kind of theory emerges. “A basic move,” Dreyfus and Taylor write, “which gives rise to this [contact] theory is a re-embedding of thought and knowledge in the bodily and social-cultural contexts in which it takes place” (18). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues “that things are disclosed first as part of a world,” and they are disclosed as “ready-to-hand,” that is, as part of our ordinary involvement with the world. The scientific stance of neutrality toward the world, seeing things as instrumentally present, can only exist derivatively from a primordial involvement with that world (34-35). Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* is a compelling revelation of how our existence in the world is bodily through and through, such that no Cartesian dualism can get a purchase in this new way of thinking: “It seems clear from the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty that the ‘engaged’ mode, in which things show up in their meanings for us, has to precede the disengaged one” (36).

A third member of this rebel group that undermines mediational epistemology is Wittgenstein, who targets an atomistic view of language and meaning,

which consisted in the view that a word was given meaning by being linked to an object in a relation of ‘naming’ or ‘signifying.’...Naming something seems like a primitive, self-sufficient operation, but when one takes it as such, ‘one forgets that a great deal of stage setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense...’ (37, 38).

Wittgenstein substitutes for the atomism of this “ostensive definition” approach to language the various language games in which humans participate, and “eventually the whole form of life in which these games have sense” (38). Both in the *Investigations* and in *On Certainty*, he makes clear that “there is no such thing as an absolutely isolated bit of information, unlinked by inferences, fore and aft” (39).

(5) The background is *embodied*. Finally, though my list is not exhaustive, Dreyfus and Taylor claim that the contact theory assumes that all knowing is embodied: “the original, inescapable locus of this constrained, preconceptual sense-making is our bodily commerce with our world” (69). Though I suspect anyone who has read the *Phenomenology of Perception* finds it impossible to appreciate the rendering of knowing in mediational epistemology solely in terms of mental acts, nevertheless, this has been the tradition inherited by modernity. The mind was said to receive sense impressions, translate them somewhat magically into ideas, and then assemble them according to logical rules into concepts and theories representing the world outside the mind.

Again, in its atomistic, abstract rendering of mental life, the critical tradition gave science an epistemological foundation that swept away traditional views of reason and understanding in an effort to bend every human activity to science's needs. Though often told, this story still needs repeating, for contrary to what might seem to be a lot of Enlightenment-bashing in post-modernity, our authors argue that "there is a big mistake operating in our culture, a kind of operative (mis)understanding of what it is to know, which has had dire effects on both theory and practice in a host of domains" (2).

Such a move of abstracting ourselves from the ordinary world in which we live, a world shot through with bodiliness, cannot help but increase our sense of alienation, of lostness. William Poteat expresses this point powerfully:

...the commonsense view of spatiality that has come down to us from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, and which has tacitly become for us the ontologically *primordial* view, is radically incoherent. What is worse, its incoherence is humanly intolerable. Persons have *places*. The conception of space under review systematically preempts the notion of *place* (1993, 33).

Our basic orientation in the world is bodily; as Dreyfus and Taylor put it, using the work of Samuel Todes, "the most primordial and unavoidable significances of things are...: that our field is shaped in terms of up or down, near or far, easily accessible or out of reach, graspable, avoidable, and so on" (69). Or, as Merleau-Ponty puts it: "Our body is...a grouping of lived-through meanings which moves toward its equilibrium" (quoted on 48). So reconceiving knowledge in terms of incarnation, of "enfleshment" in the human body, provides a more accurate understanding of knowing, and so returns philosophy to sanity.

Thus a tour through the many ways that Dreyfus and Taylor have described the "background" of knowing outlines their "contact theory," which asserts that this background is *primordial*, arises in *action*, reveals what is *meaningful* to the knower, is *holistic*, and *embodied*. Each of these features clarifies through contrast why mediational epistemology is inadequate, and points to a different approach to knowing. If we step outside this fairly standard philosophical discussion, however, to consider the views of an outsider, we find what I believe to be helpful additions to the arguments of *Retrieving Realism*, for Michael Polanyi's work deepens, augments, and extends our understanding of the background of knowing. This is not to suggest that his views oppose the views of Dreyfus and Taylor—the opposite is actually the case. It does suggest, however, that important features of the background and its implications have been overlooked.

Most striking to me is that so much of the treatment of knowing in *Retrieving Realism*, particularly its discussion of the "background," has only the most tenuous sense of a knower, an agent, as the locus of this activity. The background is referred to as

“the context” (30), as “correlates of concerned involvement” (34), as “a kind of framework or context” (20), as “conditions of intelligibility” (38), “the never-questioned overall shape of things” (45), “motor intentionality” (50), “a kind of protoknowledge” (52), and many others, none of which suggests a human being behind them. Certainly Dreyfus and Taylor assume a person is involved with all of these dimensions of the background; some of their locutions suggest this: “acting in and on a world which also acts on them” (18), or “our grasp on reality” (22), or “my ability to cope” (44), or “our bodily commerce with our world” (69). But this is the problem: there are only *suggestions* of a person who is creating or engaging the background, when Polanyi would insist that each of these background features is an aspect of a human striving to make sense of his world, and that this personal agency should never be lost in our attempts to describe knowing: “I have shown that into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known, and that this coefficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of his knowledge” (*PK*, xiv).

The extensive critique in *PK* of the claims of positivistic science from *within* science means that use of scientific knowing as the standard of a mediational view is severely curtailed. It can no longer simply be assumed that scientific knowledge as traditionally understood can be unproblematically accepted as the norm for human knowing generally. Though he first looks at knowing as it actually happens in scientific practice, Polanyi extends his perspective through all acts of knowing, in the arts, history, language, and everyday life, considerably broadening the scope of epistemology.

Dreyfus and Taylor strive mightily to avoid a Cartesian dual placing of the “background” both within the knower—in her mind, or in her body—and within the world she lives in, as this reduces to the “dualist sorting” that has worked so much mischief in philosophy (*RR*, 11-14). The structure of tacit knowing derived from Gestalt psychology, however, provides a ready solution in the polarity of tacit and explicit awareness; as Marjorie Grene puts it: “Polanyi’s solution...rests on the distinction...between two kinds of awareness: focal and subsidiary...Our explicit awareness, the focal core of consciousness, is always founded in and carried by the tacit acceptance of something not explicit, which binds, heavily and concretely, ourselves to and within our world” (*KB*, ix-x).

When we are absorbed in trying to figure out a scene before us (an unknown face, a problem, a path in the woods), there are a host of features of the scene which we do not notice, even though they may be clues to figuring out what we want to know. These clues can be either *subliminal*, unavailable for direct inspection because they are inaccessible within our bodies—our eye muscles, respiration, circulation of our blood, the firing of neurons in our brains—or *marginal*, where we could observe these clues if we chose to, such as our distance from the perceived object, the level of light in the scene, etc. Yet both kinds of clues are subsidiary to my attending to the object in front of me.

I do not observe them directly, and yet they enable me to perceive the object. Polanyi summarizes: “*We may say that my awareness of both kinds of clues is subsidiary to my focal awareness of that object*” (KB, 140, italics original).

The background to my knowledge, then, is the world of things within which I live, some of which become subsidiary clues in my seeking understanding of what is around me. Going back and forth between subsidiary and focal awareness (the active part of my background) yields the integration which is knowing. This polar process solves the mystery of how knowledge can be both background and foreground, both tacit and explicit: “I am envisaging a continuous range in degrees of indwelling, not two aspects, one from inside, the other from outside” (KB, 180, n.3). Tacit knowing therefore gives a fuller account of the role of the background than we saw with Dreyfus and Taylor:

When I move my hand before my eyes, it would keep changing its colour, its shape and its size, but for the fact that I take into account a host of rapidly changing clues, some in the field of vision, some in my eye muscles and some deeper still in my body, as in the labyrinth of the inner ear. My powers of perceiving coherence make me see these *thousand varied and changing clues* jointly as one single unchanging object... (KB, 139; italics added).

How straightforward! When we recognize something, we see its parts in a different way than when we see them in isolation, and this has been firmly established by science itself. A scientific discovery, or any intellectual insight, is established by observing particular clues focally and then making them subsidiary by shifting our attention from them to their “theoretical coherence.” Thus, Polanyi states, “this act of integration, which we can identify both in the visual perception of objects and in the discovery of scientific theories is the tacit power we have been looking for. I shall call it *tacit knowing*” (KB, 140; Polanyi will go on in *The Tacit Dimension* to elaborate the tacit in terms of proximal/distal dimensions, and functional, phenomenal, semantic and ontological aspects). But it is his examples of what Dreyfus and Taylor call “skilled coping” that are especially helpful in seeing the simple profundity of his theory. In riding a bicycle, swimming, giving a speech, or recognizing a face, we are integrating subsidiary clues to a focal meaning, and the fact that the clues that give the activity or object its meaning are subsidiary means that we cannot tell, in any complete, explicit way, how it is that we do these things. An additional advantage of the polar structure of tacit knowing is that it enables us to account for the persistence of the mediational view, for the subsidiary pole of awareness, because tacit and unseen, could easily be assimilated to a vague “mind” and so ignored, while the focal pole of awareness provided the explicit features that Cartesianism desired. In short, properly understood, “background” is shorthand for “a knower engaged in the world.”

An additional feature of Polanyi's treatment of these themes that I find absent in Dreyfus and Taylor is the notion of *indwelling*, which links up the simple act of perception (including its background) with the deeper comprehension of complex entities that we commonly call "knowledge." In ordinary perception, I integrate tacit clues (the movement of muscles in my eyes, the position of my head, the light that falls on the scene, etc.) into a comprehensive whole that makes sense, that I can identify ("There's John over there"). This integration is tantamount to dwelling in those clues, participating in their relations to one another to such a degree that we interiorize them, extending our bodies through them in a sense, in much the same way that we extend ourselves with tools or instruments, as when one is playing the piano, or reading an absorbing novel; we forget about the piano or the book as we focus entirely on the meaning of the music or the story. This indwelling is particularly important when we are engaging with other people or with complex entities or ideas, for it allows us to participate in that which we are trying to know. So my relation to a symphony's performance of a Mozart concerto goes beyond "hearing the notes;" I indwell those sounds to a degree that may allow me to know it at a deeper level than purely passive listening would, even to being "carried away" by the music. Such indwelling, to give one example of its relevance, could offer plentiful resources to the desire of Dreyfus and Taylor to "fuse horizons" between different cultures, so that alternative modernities can live together peacefully (Chapter Six).

On Realism

Thus far my comments on *Retrieving Realism* have focused on the central theme of "background." A second element of human knowledge tackled by our authors is its connection to a "real" world, and it is their treatment of realism that I now examine. The first thing we notice in *RR* is the use of a plethora of terms and phrases to describe "the real": "physical objects around us" (6), "the components of the universe as they are in themselves, absolutely independent of any relation to our embodiment" (133), "the universe as it is in itself" (131), "nature as it is in itself" (149), and many others. Such a variety is true to our normal speech, as far as it goes, as well as our normal experience, and reminds us that careful reflection on an idea does not require that we achieve an explicit definition of that idea. In fact, such a requirement may only short-circuit our reflection. Tracking such usage, however, can indicate patterns of thought which are never actually stated—thus the usefulness of etymology—and in *RR* I detect a *spatial* dimension: "reality" is that which is separate from "us" The real is "...as it is in itself," which, when we are talking of "the world" (65, etc.) or "the cosmos" (137), or "the universe" (146), can only mean separate from the human knower, something standing over there, not connected to the person.

Such spatiality seems harmless, perhaps, but it does seem to allow back in a shadow of the “mind inside, world outside” dualism Dreyfus and Taylor have been so determined to escape (11-12). It also complicates their later attempts to argue that science actually discovers a “reality” that is independent of our language, for they have already defined “the real” as that which is “totally independent of us” (138). Rorty can simply point to such descriptions as “self-fulfilling prophecies”—the claim that science shows reality is actually independent of us merely repeats our definition, without ever getting outside the circle of language.

Here Polanyi presents another possibility, that of referring to reality in terms that emphasize *temporal*, as well as simply spatial features of the real: “it [reality] is capable of yet manifesting itself indefinitely in the future” (*KB*, 170). There is a certain mystery in our encounters with the world, since some features of that world are always hidden from us. “My definition of reality, as that which may yet inexhaustibly manifest itself, implies the presence of an indeterminate range of anticipations in any knowledge bearing on reality” (*KB*, 141). In integrating various clues that are available to us, we anticipate what is there, we envision possibilities that will only prove right or wrong over time. Marjorie Grene notes that this is one of the (few) insights of Heidegger: “Being-ahead-of-oneself”: human being is always in advance of itself; we project ourselves as what we mean to make of ourselves. For human being(s), the primary tense is future” (1995, 72). Such a future orientation also better allows for changes that will occur in science itself (e.g., from classical physics to quantum mechanics), changes that occur in our grasp of reality, and for the inevitable surprises and contradictions of human expectations that science continually presents. This way of speaking of reality—that which “may yet reveal itself to our deepened understanding in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations” (*KB*, 133)—shifts the emphasis of “reality” from an independently existing thing out there, “totally independent of us” (138), to that which is constituted *both* by what is there “outside our skins,” and by the human knower who is making sense of what is encountered by indwelling the various clues that she has picked up in her search for the meaning of the experience. In contrast to both Rorty and Dreyfus and Taylor, this understanding encompasses a world with a significant degree of independence, *and* a human being striving to comprehend that world and express it in language. I do not find this degree of holism in Dreyfus and Taylor.

To be clear, Polanyi is not suggesting that “reality” is made up only of our anticipations of the future. He illustrates and confirms the observation of *Retrieving Realism* that most scientists are “robust realists” (135). His work is full of descriptions of the actual practice of science in which the belief in an external reality drives the effort to discover more about that reality: “Why do we entrust the life and guidance of our thoughts to our conceptions? Because we believe that their manifest rationality is due to their being in contact with domains of reality, of which they have grasped one aspect” (*PK*, 104).

Polanyi's understanding of reality, arising from his view of the panorama of tacit knowing which he has developed in great detail, bridges the gap between person and world that so bedevils traditional views of epistemology. Humans are embedded in a world which they can gradually know, and scientific discovery is one piece of evidence that the world they know is actually there, and not just "in their heads."

Dreyfus and Taylor emphasize in their use of Merleau-Ponty and Samuel Todes that perception offers the most accessible clues to our embeddedness in the world. Polanyi's approach connects perception to his understanding of reality, for just as we cannot specify the clues we indwell to achieve knowledge, there is an indeterminate range of non-specifiable clues, of anticipations, whose meaning will only become clear when they are integrated in a whole vision. The very vagueness of the human mind, when compared to the exactitude of physics, is a sign of the vast resources humans command in making sense of the world, particularly through the use of language; it is also a sign of the tacit character of these powers, rooted as they are in bodily perception. Polanyi asserts that "by my definition, this [vagueness or] indeterminacy makes mind the more real, the more substantial" (*KB*, 151). than the tangible objects which have been elevated to center stage in modern discussions of knowing. People are more real than cobblestones, so that a humane realism, a critical realism somewhat similar, perhaps, to Dreyfus and Taylor's "pluralist robust realism," is certainly on firmer ground than are most current ontologies.

Conclusion

The many ways that Dreyfus and Taylor have explicated the meaning of "background" provides extensive support for their argument that "our explicit thinking about the world is contextualized and given its sense by an implicit, largely unarticulated background sense of our being in the world" (67). It is also important that their explication of the background has been woven from insights of a number of major philosophers, chiefly Kant, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and the later Wittgenstein—hardly minority voices.⁶

Nevertheless, there is room for at least one more voice. The various features of the background to our knowledge—preconceptual, active, embodied and the rest—have been expressed in *RR* in a philosophical idiom appropriate to the academic venues in which the discussions have occurred. It is science, however, which has provided one of the main bulwarks defending the mediational perspective, and it is in philosophy of science that many of the conflicts have been fought, particularly over the question of realism. Do our scientific claims express real knowledge of an independently existing natural world? Or, as Davidson and Rorty have argued, is science only a particular corner of the linguistic world, where "knowledge consists only in beliefs being justified by other beliefs," rather than by contact with reality? (Dreyfus in Abbey, 2004,

60, 68-75). Given the status and power of science in our society, the stakes in our answers to these questions could not be higher. This being the case, would you not think that philosophers would pay attention to a distinguished scientist—none of those mentioned are—who has written extensively on these very issues? The irony is that Polanyi’s ventures in philosophy were dismissed by telling him that “cobblers should stick to their lasts,” while philosophers with no experience as practicing scientists made abundant judgments about science (Langford and Poteat 1968, 4)!

His absence is the mystery surrounding Michael Polanyi in modern discussions of realism—he is a ghost in the room, ignored by almost everyone. To read Polanyi essays like “The Logic of Tacit Inference” and “Tacit Knowing: Its Bearing on Some Problems of Philosophy,” published fifty years ago, reminds one of his prescience, and also confirms his assertion that the measure of how well one has described reality is the degree to which that description is confirmed in unexpected ways in the future. (*KB*, 138-180). Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor are doing battle, of course, on the field of contemporary philosophy, and so use weapons and strategies appropriate to that arena. Perhaps it is still possible, however, contrary to all the expectations of the academy, that an Extra-Territorial may provide unanticipated contributions to this important effort.

ENDNOTES

¹Hereafter, page numbers to *Retrieving Realism* will be cited parenthetically in the text.

²Dreyfus and Taylor (2015), Schear (2013), and Dreyfus’ article in Abbey, 2004. I want to thank Phil Mullins and Esther Meek for indirect help with my reading of *Retrieving Realism* through their earlier comments on the book, in connection with their own work. Since *Retrieving Realism* has been or is being discussed by others in *Tradition and Discovery*, my comments will not be synoptic, but selective.

³There are well over 100 different terms, by my count. This abundance of terms may not be surprising to phenomenologists, but it is most annoying to analytic philosophers (see Bernard Williams’ comments on Heidegger and Rorty in Williams 2004).

⁴See W.H. Poteat’s statement of this point in “George Steiner: the Extra-Territorial Critic,” in Nickell and Stines 1993, 261-62.

⁵These earlier efforts can be seen in books like Dreyfus (1992) and Taylor (1985).

⁶This is laid out more fully in Taylor’s well-known article, “Overcoming Epistemology” (1995, 1-19).

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